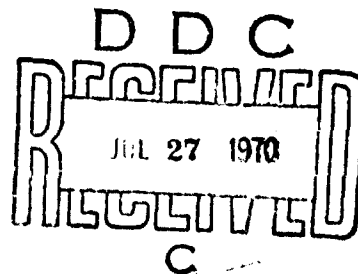


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AMERICAN AND SOVIET DEFENSE SYSTEMS VIS-À-VIS THE MIDDLE EAST

P. M. Dadant

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AMERICAN AND SOVIET DEFENSE SYSTEMS VIS-A-VIS THE MIDDLE EAST

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I. AN OVERRIDING CONCERN

It seems natural to many people that the Middle East should grip the attention of the world. This strategic area, credited by many as being the cradle of civilization, has been a hotbed for trouble since the dawn of that civilization. Forces spawned within the area and forces from without have surged back and forth through these barren deserts and fertile valleys. Even in this age of superpowers, of rockets to the moon, of nuclear energy and of worldwide pollution, the old Middle East remains important in international politics. To the two superpowers it presents opportunities, problems, dilemmas and, above all, a common danger.

The United States and the Soviet Union have one major concern in common in the Middle East: that any disturbance there does not escalate into an American-Soviet confrontation with its accompanying danger of all-out nuclear war. This common concern manifested itself most directly in 1967 when both major powers carefully avoided being drawn into the Arab-Israeli war. It has been evident since that Six-Day War in Soviet attempts to dissuade the Arab nations from renewing open warfare--this in spite of the willingness of the Soviet Union to furnish Arab nations with military supplies. It is also evident in attempts by the major powers to at least give an appearance of negotiating toward a Middle East settlement.

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There can be no doubt that the danger of a U.S.-USSR confrontation exists in the Middle East. Such a danger exists, of course, in any area in which the two nations have overlapping or conflicting interests, but it seems particularly acute in the Middle East because of the explosive nature of the situation and because the superpower relations in the area tend more and more toward those of patrons of opposing client states that are on the threshold of open warfare.

It appears difficult, however, to construct a credible scenario leading to superpower confrontation in the Middle East. The United States, for example, appears very unlikely to move into the area militarily, particularly in the wake of Vietnam; little else than the imminent collapse of Israel and overrunning of the land by Arab armies seems likely to cause a commitment of U.S. military force. If an Arab advance pursued such final objectives, however, Soviet participation would seem extremely unlikely, so that U.S. intervention in such extreme circumstances would probably not risk a U.S.-USSR confrontation.

It is perhaps equally difficult to envisage the Soviets putting substantial military force into the Middle East. They have a history of not employing their own troops either at any distance from their territory or against states other than those they consider their own satellites.

That both powers would be drawn in and would pursue their respective courses until collision seems doubly unlikely. Mutual recognition of the confrontation danger lessens the probability of its occurrence even further. Active intervention by one superpower on behalf of a losing "client" might turn a losing military tide, for example, but might also insure against a threat to the other side so substantial as to bring in the opposing superpower.

Despite this, the dangers of confrontation cannot be dismissed. The United States has identified herself with a commitment to the existence of the State of Israel--a commitment that has not been formalized but to which many statements by government officials have attested. The Soviets, meanwhile, deepen their commitment to the Arab states by continued economic and military aid, and have become deeply embroiled in the improvement of radical Arab forces--forces that have in the past

proven themselves to be peculiarly beyond Soviet control. Many conceivable developments could create situations in which each superpower would find it hard to back away without unacceptable loss of prestige and influence in the area.

Heightening the nuclear danger is the future possibility of Israeli development of a nuclear weapon. Israel presently has undeniable superiority in conventional war capability that makes it seem unlikely that she would resort to a nuclear threat, thereby opening the door for Arab cries for a counter-capability. Their Arab neighbors, however, outnumber the Israelis by nearly 20 to 1, and the possibility of future meaningful increase in Arab conventional capabilities is always present. There can be little doubt that in dire circumstances Israel would use any threat she felt would insure her existence, and many observers have speculated that Israel may already have the capability to develop a nuclear weapon. Appreciation of this by the superpowers and Arab awareness of an Israeli nuclear potential could be a constant irritant in Middle East affairs in the next decade.

Barring a pronounced change in the political complexion of the area, or in the superpower interests and stated or implied commitments to Middle East states, this concern with avoiding a nuclear confrontation is certain to mark Soviet and American thinking about the Middle East through the 1970s. It must be like a heavy hand weighing on all other concerns in the area and tempering all superpower moves with respect to the Middle East.

## II. MAJOR INTERESTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In spite of the overriding concern with avoiding nuclear confrontation, other interests in the Middle East appear destined to prolong both Soviet and American involvement in the area. Not the least of these, of course, is the insistent Soviet drive toward expansion of Russian influence and extension of the Communist revolution. Russian desire to expand southward has a long history, formerly being based primarily on a desire for a warm water port that would be free of the stricture of the Bosphorus. It took a heavy-handed turn when "Stalin in 1945 denounced the treaty of neutrality and nonaggression with Turkey

and demanded joint Russian-Turkish management of the straits and the surrender of three provinces in the northeast adjacent to Soviet Armenia. With Red Army units still in Iran, he promoted the secession of Azarbayjan and Kurdistan in the northwest. Stalin's heavy-handed diplomacy deprived Russia of an opportunity to update the 1936 Montreux Convention, which regulated the use of the straits, and forced Russia to withdraw its troops from Iran with immense embarrassment, in the full international glare of the Security Council. It also drove Turkey, and later Iran, into intimate relations with the United States."<sup>1</sup>

Having alienated the states on her southern border, Russia in 1953 began a program to gain influence in the Middle East by backing at the United Nations the Arab claims in their dispute with Israel. Whether by crafty Soviet design or, as seems more likely, through opportunism, this program appears to be an outstanding success since "today, less than 17 years later, the Soviet Union has firmly established herself as a major power in the Middle East."<sup>2</sup> "Ironically, the western states themselves largely created the new opportunities for the Soviet Union."<sup>3</sup> First, when President Nasser in 1955 asked the United States for arms the Americans hesitated because they did not wish to provide Egypt with weapons that might lead to another Middle East war. As a result, Nasser "turned to the Soviet Union and [acquired]...(through the agency of Czechoslovakia)...about \$250 million worth of...arms."<sup>4</sup> This was the modest beginning of a large-scale supply of Soviet Bloc arms to the "radical" Arab states. Second, the United States in 1956 withdrew its offer to help in financing the Aswan High Dam on the Nile. After some delay the Russians in 1958 extended their own offer and Egypt accepted. Third, the Eisenhower Doctrine, proclaimed in 1957, apparently alienated

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<sup>1</sup>Hurewitz, J. C., "Origins of Rivalry," in "Soviet-American Rivalry in the Middle East," J. C. Hurewitz, ed., Frederick A. Praeger, 1969, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Hunter, Robert E., "The Soviet Dilemma in the Middle East Part I: Problems of Commitment," Adelphi Papers, Number 59, The Institute for Strategic Studies, September 1969, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

more Arabs than it impressed, being widely interpreted as outside interference in Arab affairs, and projected the Soviet Union as the only great power that seemed willing to support Arab nationalism and freedom from outside interference. When the U.S. sent 14,000 men to Lebanon in 1958, this view was strengthened and opportunities for Soviet arms sales in the Middle East increased.

"Since the Russians had no long-standing position to protect, they had little to lose and potentially much to gain by change and disruption in the Arab Middle East."<sup>1</sup> They apparently failed to understand the nature of Arab politics, however, and to appreciate the conflict between Communism and various Arab nationalist attitudes. In both Syria and Iraq the Soviets supported local Communists who moved too fast, overstepped themselves and lost out to Nationalistic forces. Their relations with Egypt, Syria, and Iraq fluctuated considerably as various Arab factions struggled for power and regimes changed in Syria and Iraq. In the mid-1960s the Arabs, spurred by competition for power within their own world, stepped up their anti-Israel activities. This presented new opportunities for the Soviet Union, whose aid and support were more in demand than ever. She sold arms to Arab states on very attractive terms in order to capture the market and gain whatever influence comes with being an arms supplier, and increased her economic aid commitments. She also became vocal in supporting Arab causes.

At first the Soviets seemed perfectly safe in becoming more deeply involved in the Middle East. In fact, "until a few months before the Six-Day War--there was little evidence that the Soviet Union had begun to consider seriously that a policy of opportunism could also entail risks."<sup>2</sup> In early May of 1967, she apparently "warned" Syria and Egypt that Israeli troops were massing on the Syrian border, prepared to attack. Although patently untrue, these reports started a round of political escalation and military movements within the Arab states until Israel suddenly launched what she considered a preventive war on 5 June.

Mid-way in the crisis the Soviet Union seems to have realized that events were getting out of control and that total war in the Middle East

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

also raised risks for the Soviet Union. She began trying to prevent war; but she was too late.

The Six-Day War initially appeared to ruin the Soviet position in the Arab world. Her seeming unwillingness to save her Arab clients from a sound thrashing at the hands of Israel--which may have been more inability than unwillingness--threatened to destroy all the recent gains in Soviet influence. In her eagerness not to lose the position she had gained in the Middle East, Russia undertook a massive re-arming of the defeated Arab states. The Soviet position in the area was not only recaptured but increased as a result, although only at the expense of further increasing the Soviet commitment to and involvement in an area where, according to Malcolm Kerr, "it is not within the power of outsiders to adjust the flame under the pot."<sup>1</sup> Although her control of events in the area had just been proven to be marginal at best, the Soviet Union demonstrated that she is unlikely to give up her gains in the Middle East without a struggle; judging by past performance, she is almost certain to try to expand them at every opportunity.

The United States has consistently opposed Soviet expansion in all parts of the world. Alarmed by the rapid fall of all the Eastern European states to Soviet domination after WW II, the United States developed a policy of containment that attempted to ring Soviet Russia with states allied to and supported by the U.S. and pledged to resist Soviet expansion.

In the Middle East this took several forms. Military assistance to Turkey and Iran began during Marshall Plan years (1949-1952), and expanded greatly after 1953. Individual mutual defense agreements were arranged with Turkey in 1951 and with Iran in 1952. Turkey was admitted to NATO on February 18, 1952. In 1955 the Bagdad Pact was formed by Turkey and Iraq with obvious U.S. support but without open U.S. membership;<sup>2</sup> this Pact was joined by the United Kingdom and Pakistan during

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<sup>1</sup>Kerr, Malcolm H., "Persistence of Regional Quarrels," in "SAR in ME" (see 1.), p. 228.

<sup>2</sup>The U.S. was not a signatory to the Bagdad Pact nor to its successor, CENTO. However, she is an observer at CENTO Council meetings and a member of the Military, Economic, and Anti-Subversion Committees. See "U.S. Defense Commitments and Assurances," Dept. of the State, Aug. 67, p. 15.

1955, and finally in November of that year by Iran. In January of 1957, President Eisenhower proposed the Eisenhower Doctrine, which was approved by Congress in March of that year. This Doctrine authorized the President "to undertake, in the general area of the Middle East, military assistance programs with any nation or group of nations of that area desiring assistance" and declared the U.S. "prepared to use armed force to assist any nation or group of nations requesting assistance against armed aggression from any country controlled by international Communism."<sup>1</sup> In 1959 the U.S. Government entered into bilateral "Agreements of Cooperation" with Turkey and Iran.<sup>2</sup>

Initially, the Bagdad Pact seemed to promise success in blocking the Russians from expansion into the Middle East, even though it also tended to alienate states to the south. A coup in Iraq in July of 1958, however, saw the Iraqi King and Prime Minister murdered. Iraq then swung away from its close ties with the West and withdrew from the Pact prior to its redesignation as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in August of 1959. CENTO has proved to be a very weak organization and without Iraq has seemed to lose what meaning the Bagdad Pact had had.

Although strongly suspicious of Russia because of her post-World War II policies, Turkey and Iran have softened their attitudes over the years. Both of these countries are now engaged in a normalization of relations with the Soviet Union, increasing their trade with Russia and, in the case of Iran, accepting Russian military supplies.

The old American policy of containment thus appears nearly defunct in the Middle East, with the Northern Tier both softening and being leapfrogged by Soviet inroads into Arab states. Yet America is unlikely to give up her attempts to thwart Russian expansion in this area. She still tends to view every expansion of Soviet influence as a threat to herself and to other nations of the Free World, and to see such events as the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and announcement of the Brezhnev Doctrine as justifying that view. As a result of the Vietnam experience, America is developing a strong note of caution in her foreign

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<sup>1</sup>"United States Defense Commitments and Assurances," Department of State, August 1967, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-17.

policy and a pronounced reluctance to get drawn into entanglements that would again risk military involvement in any "peripheral" area. That the American view of the Middle East is vastly different from her view of Southeast Asia, however, was dramatically demonstrated in 1967 when innumerable Vietnam doves suddenly became Middle East hawks. Just how "peripheral" Americans might consider the Middle East in a new crisis in that area is a moot point.

Although less important than the possibility of nuclear confrontation and Russian expansion or America blockage of Soviet influence, other underlying interests in the Middle East strongly affect super-power attitudes toward the area. Oil, the primary Middle East resource, must be reckoned among the most important, both economically and strategically. As Table 1 indicates, the Middle East supplied nearly 30 percent of the World's crude oil production in 1967, in spite of much of the Middle East capacity being curtailed for about a month following the Six-Day War. It is estimated that America has over \$2 billion invested in the Middle East, nearly all in oil, and that America realizes an income of \$1 billion per year from her oil interests in the area. Loss of this investment and favorable income could not be taken lightly.

The United States herself used only about 2 percent of the annual production of Middle East oil in 1967;<sup>1</sup> loss of this supply would hardly be serious and could easily be made up by increased domestic U.S. production. However, U.S. reserves are limited, and it is estimated that the future increase of these reserves will be outstripped by increasing consumption. Having access to the vast reserves of easily recovered Middle East oil may therefore become more important to the U.S. as the 70s progress.

The dependence of U.S. allies on Middle East oil may be more immediately crucial. As Table 2 shows, much of Western Europe received over 50 percent of its crude oil supply from the Middle East in 1967, despite the month-long boycott by the Arab states following the Six-Day War; Japan received nearly 80 percent of her crude oil from that area. Even

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<sup>1</sup>"Oil Statistic 1967 Supply and Disposal," The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris 1968, pp. 26-27.

Table 1

WORLD CRUDE OIL PRODUCTION, 1967<sup>a</sup>

Country or Area	Millions of Tons
Saudi Arabia	129.3
Kuwait	115.2
Iraq	60.2
Neutral Zone	22.6
Abu Dhabi	18.1
Qatar	15.5
Iran	129.3
Other Middle East	<u>14.8</u>
Middle East Total	505.0
U.S.A.	433.7
Venezuela	184.1
Canada	47.2
Other Western Hemisphere	<u>68.3</u>
Western Hemisphere Total	733.3
Western Europe Total	20.0
Libya	83.8
Algeria	38.4
Other Africa	<u>22.0</u>
Africa Total	144.2
U.S.S.R.	288.3
Other Communist Bloc	<u>26.8</u>
Communist Bloc Total	315.1
Far East Total	<u>38.2</u>
WORLD TOTAL	1755.8

<sup>a</sup>T. T. Connors, "An Examination of the International Flow of Crude Oil, With Special Reference to the Middle East," The Rand Corporation, P-4209, October 1969, pp. 9, 13, 17, 20, 23, 25.

Table 2  
WESTERN EUROPE'S CRUDE OIL CONSUMPTION  
VS IMPORTS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST<sup>a</sup>

Country(s)	Millions of Tons		Import as percent of Consumption
	Crude Oil Consumption	Middle East Imports	
Benelux	48	32	67
France	67	35	52
W. Germany	93	30	32
Italy	65	54	83
U.K.	86	43	50
Nor./Swed./Den.	40	9	23
Other W. Europe <sup>b</sup>	63	22	35
Total	462	225	49 (average)

<sup>a</sup>Connors, T. T., "An Examination of the International Flow of Crude Oil, with Special Reference to the Middle East," The Rand Corporation, P-4209, October 1969, p. 56. Middle East includes: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Qatar, Neut. Zone, and Egypt.

<sup>b</sup>Includes: Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and Turkey.

with new discoveries elsewhere, this picture is not likely to change markedly. The demand for oil is increasing in all of the industrialized nations; oil imports to Western Europe were rising at an annual rate of 12 percent through 1967, and those to Japan were increasing 22 percent per year.<sup>1</sup> Keeping the supply flowing appears vital to both the economies and the military machines of America's allies.

When the Arabs shut off the supply to the western nations in June of 1967, Western Europe temporarily appeared to be in possibly serious difficulty. However, Iran increased her production and most of the rest of the shortage was filled from other areas in the world. Finding other markets lacking, the Arab nations soon relented and allowed shipments to the West to be resumed. Even if Russia could gain complete

<sup>1</sup>Connors, T. T., "An Examination of the International Flow of Crude Oil, with Special Reference to the Middle East," The Rand Corporation, P-4209, October 1969, p. 47.

control of Middle East Oil, therefore, she might have severe difficulty in turning off the supply to America's allies for any extended period.

Russia herself exports large quantities of oil to Eastern Europe and to Western nations, and plans to double her production by 1980.<sup>1</sup> Although Russia has little use for Middle East oil in the near future, the picture is less clear for the longer run. Both Russian and Eastern European consumption is increasing rapidly, and some authorities feel that the Soviet Bloc as a whole may be an oil importer by 1980. A substantial increase in automobiles in the Communist nations could greatly aggravate the situation. Then, too, Middle East petroleum is much cheaper to extract than Soviet petroleum. In fact, one of the chief attractions of Middle East oil is its relatively low cost. Kuwait, for example, produced crude oil in 1967 for about 1/8 the cost of Venezuelan oil production and at about 5 percent of the cost of North American production.<sup>2</sup> Much of Southern Russia could probably be supplied considerably more cheaply from the Middle East than from Soviet oil fields. Cheap Middle East oil could also encourage further Russian encroachment into West European oil markets, toward which the Soviets have already made several moves.

For the even more distant future, the Middle East still sits atop nearly sixty percent of the world's proven oil reserves.<sup>3</sup> In spite of recent discoveries elsewhere, it would seem unfortunate from the American point of view if such a valuable and extensive resource fell under control of unfriendly hands. From the Soviet viewpoint, a share in control of this vast resource and a share in the profits from Middle East oil must appear as at least an enticing by-product of any increase in influence in this area.

Another underlying interest in the Middle East, the Suez Canal, has lost much of its importance. In 1965 this vital waterway carried 225 million tons of supplies, about 75 percent of which was oil, and the flow was increasing by over 14 million tons annually.<sup>4</sup> However,

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<sup>1</sup>Hurewitz, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup>Connors, pp. 61-62.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>"The Middle East and North Africa, 1966-1967," 13th Ed., Europa Publications, London, 1967, p. 86.

the Canal was closed during the Six-Day War and has not yet been reopened. In the 2-1/2 years that have elapsed, many changes have occurred. The initial impact of the closure was to raise the price of many goods in Western Europe and to decrease the availability of markets for Western European products. As one example, the tanker freight rate between the Persian Gulf and Rotterdam prior to June 1967 was \$3.23 per ton; by September 1967 it was \$16.50.<sup>1</sup> However, many alternate routes have been developed by now, and alternate means of transportation have improved, so that it is doubtful that an immediate and complete reopening of the Canal would have anything like the reverse impact that its closure had in 1967.

Most prominent among the new developments are the supertankers that are being added to the world's fleets. By the end of 1967, only 2 tankers over 200,000 dead weight tons were in service. By November of 1968, 153 more were on order.<sup>2</sup> One estimate holds that one-third of the world fleet will consist of tankers in excess of 150,000 tons by the end of 1971. The largest tanker that could use the Suez Canal prior to 1967, on the other hand, was about 60,000 dead weight tons; over 50 percent of the world's ocean-going capacity will soon be in tankers that exceed that size.<sup>3</sup>

The supertankers would be unable to use a reopened Suez Canal without extensive widening and deepening, and therefore would have to continue to circumnavigate Africa to reach Western Europe from the Persian Gulf. A large part of the costs of ocean shipping, however, is in investment, insurance, port costs, and the like; adding transit distance has but small effect on the overall cost of a voyage.<sup>4</sup> In addition, crew requirements for the supertankers are usually no greater than for the smaller tankers, making the economies of scale substantial. It has been estimated, for example, that "A tanker with a capacity for 150,000 dead weight tons can move crude oil 5,000 miles at \$1.69 per ton compared to \$7.29 for a 10,000 dead weight ton tanker. Construction costs

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<sup>1</sup>Navy Magazine, September 1967, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup>Connors, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>4</sup>Connors, T. T., "Some Additional Data on Costs and Distance in Maritime Foreign Trade," unpublished.

decrease with increasing tanker size from \$220.00 per ton at 20,000 dead weight tons to less than \$70.00 at 300,000 dead weight tons. Operating costs decrease, too, in particular with increased opportunities for automation. In fact, the Tokyo Maru, a tanker of about 135,000 dead weight tons, will be operated by a crew of 29, while tankers of 50,000 dead weight tons may use 35 men or more. As a result of such changes not only are detours around gateways like Suez cheaper than they were; they may, because of the limitations of the gateways themselves, be cheaper than the direct route."<sup>1</sup>

In addition to this, the Canal silts up quite rapidly and must be continually dredged when in operation. In the 2-1/2 years since its closure, no dredging has been done; neither have any ships passed through the Canal, of course, and some believe that turbulence from ships causes much of the normal silting. No one is certain just how much silting has taken place, but one source estimated that as early as December of 1967, four months of dredging would have been required before the canal could have been back to near its pre-1967 status.<sup>2</sup> By now the dredging operation could require a matter of years, and would be a very expensive operation. With the heavy investments in mammoth tankers that could not use the canal without additional deepening and widening, lenders might be reluctant to invest in the canal's future.

The Soviet Union, on the other hand, may be quite interested in having the canal reopened. To her it would be very useful in furthering interests in the Persian Gulf and in areas bordering the Indian Ocean. That the Soviets are interested in the Indian Ocean was graphically illustrated by the extended visit of Russian warships to that area in 1968, when the cruiser Dmitri Pozharsky, a missile ship, and an anti-submarine escort ship visited ports in India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Aden, Somalia, and Persian Gulf ports.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Wohlstetter, A. J., "Strength, Interest, and New Technologies," presented at Elsinore, September 28, 1967, as the opening address of the 9th Annual Conference of the Institute of Strategic Studies on Military Technology in the 1970s.

<sup>2</sup>The Economist, "The Canal by Christmas," August 19, 1967, p. 664.

<sup>3</sup>"Russia Moves Into Indian Ocean Area," The Los Angeles Times, March 8, 1970, p. 1.

Without the Suez Canal, however, the Indian Ocean is not readily accessible to the Russians. Although the 1968 cruise was made by ships from the Soviet Pacific Fleet, Soviet Pacific Coast ports are severely handicapped by fog in spring and fall, and by ice in winter.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the south coast of Arabia is over 6,100 n mi from the nearest Soviet Pacific port. From more favorable ports on the Black Sea, the same destination is nearly 11,500 n mi if one must transit the Mediterranean, exit at Gibraltar and circumnavigate Africa. If the Suez Canal were available, on the other hand, Soviet ships sailing from the Black Sea would require only 3200 n mi to reach the same point. This short trip from warm water ports on the Black Sea, close to the industrial heartland of the Soviet Union, would be much more attractive to the Soviets in pursuing economic interests or maintaining a military presence in the Indian Ocean area than any presently available options.

Soviet use of the Suez Canal prior to its closure demonstrates that the Canal would be even more widely useful to them than merely for maintaining their Indian Ocean interests. Before the June 1967 closure, for example, the Soviet Union was putting five to seven ships a month through the Canal with supplies for North Vietnam.<sup>2</sup>

The United States also has interests in the Indian Ocean and has maintained a Middle East Force since the end of World War II. Although it normally consists only of 2 destroyers and a flagship, this small force has made many port visits throughout the Indian Ocean area in past years. Reopening of the Suez Canal would simplify America's job of maintaining this Force, which is currently supplied from the United States East Coast via a route of nearly 11,000 n mi around the southern tip of Africa. With the Suez reopened this trip could be cut to about 6,600 n mi. Perhaps even more important, ships could easily be rotated to and from the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean if that were desirable. However, this decrease in distance from United States East Coast ports is not nearly as dramatic as the shortening of the route from the Black

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<sup>1</sup>"The Changing Strategic Naval Balance USSR and U.S.A.," Prepared at the Request of the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, U.S. Government Printing Office, December 1968, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup>Connors, p. 58.

Sea to the Persian Gulf. On balance, it appears that at present the reopening of the Canal is more vital to Soviet interests than to those of the United States.

One ancient interest in the Middle East seems to be of questionable validity in today's world: highly regarded in past centuries as the land bridge between the Eurasian Continent and Africa, the Middle East now holds little attraction for this purpose. Only one north-south rail line runs through the area and part of that is currently unusable; good highways are also lacking. With today's technology, people and goods can be moved so cheaply by boat and so quickly by air that there would seem to be little reason to incur the expense of improving this land-bridge route.

Its central location in the Eurasian-African land mass does make the Middle East a valuable basing area, however. Airbases in particular would be useful to the Soviets in moving either cargo or military forces through the Middle East. Should the Soviet Union wish to supply quick and substantial military assistance to an African constituent, for example, airfields in the Middle East would be most convenient refueling bases. Only a few Soviet tactical fighter aircraft presently have sufficient range to fly from a base in, say, Yugoslavia to even the closest point in Africa, to say nothing of making it from a base in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, nearly any fighter aircraft could hop from a base near Baku in southern Russia through an airbase in Iraq, then to either Jordan or Arabia, and on to Egypt and beyond if such routes were available. Cargo aircraft might find the same routes useful, perhaps with fewer stops, since their use would allow the aircraft to carry maximum loads.

New developments promise to decrease the importance of even that aspect of Middle Eastern lands. At the Paris air show in 1965, the Soviet Union displayed a huge new transport aircraft, the AN-22, capable of lifting some 88 tons for a distance of 3,100 mi., or 50 tons for 6,800 mi.<sup>1</sup> From bases in Southern Russia, these aircraft could reach

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<sup>1</sup>"Jane's All The World's Aircraft: 1969-70," Jane's All The World's Aircraft Publishing Company, Ltd., London, 1969, p. 467.

all of Africa and Southeast Asia without a stop. A large fleet of these aircraft would give the Soviets tremendous new flexibility in moving supplies to distant places.

Naval bases in the Middle East can also be an asset, either in operating to the west in the Mediterranean Sea or to the south and south-east into the Indian Ocean. As the Soviets are already demonstrating with their use of the facilities at Alexandria and Port Said, the flexibility and staying power of the Russian fleet in the Mediterranean is greatly enhanced by access to ports on that sea. Ports such as Aden, on the other hand, give ready access to the Arabian Sea and, as British experience shows, can be valuable in extending seapower southward and eastward. From a base in this area the Russians could set up a permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean, much as they have in the Mediterranean Sea.

For the United States, the Middle East is not on a north-south route but could be a stepping stone for east-west activities between the Atlantic-European region and the Indian Ocean area. The Indian Ocean, however, is on the opposite side of the globe from the U.S.; in fact, Ceylon is about the same distance by sea from Seattle through the Straits of Malaysia as it is from New York through Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. Airbases in the Middle East would be useful to the United States as refueling points in reaching areas in and around the Indian Ocean, but other routes can be used with no added difficulty if they contain comparable refueling bases, and in some cases would result in a shorter overall trip. From the U.S. to most of Africa, a route through the Middle East would be unnecessarily circuitous, although it could be used in getting to Ethiopia and other parts of Northeast Africa.

A naval base on the Mediterranean side of the Middle East is less important for the United States than for the USSR. The U.S. Sixth Fleet already operates out of Gaeta, Italy and has demonstrated that it can maintain a permanent presence anywhere in the Mediterranean Sea. Prior to the Six-Day War, the Soviets had no available Mediterranean base. On the Indian Ocean side of the Middle East, however, a naval base has the same meaning for the United States as for the USSR. The U.S. Middle East Force currently operates out of Bahrain, an Island in the Persian

Gulf, where facilities of a British Royal Navy station are used for logistics purposes. Without the facilities of such a port somewhere on the borders of the Indian Ocean, maintaining a permanent naval presence in that ocean would be extremely difficult if not impossible for either of the great powers.

The strongest United States interest in the Middle East--and potentially perhaps the most dangerous--is her identification with the continued existence of the State of Israel. Although never formalized, the commitment to this cause seems at least as strong in the U.S. as many commitments that have been the subject of treaties, as can be judged from the reactions to the Six-Day War. As recently as March of 1970, President Nixon stated that the United States would move to assure Israeli security if the balance of power in the Middle East were disturbed,<sup>1</sup> and Secretary of State Rogers said, "---we have no intention of jeopardizing the security of Israel."<sup>2</sup>

While trying to discover a way to reach a peaceful Middle East settlement that would assure Israel's security, the United States in 1967 assumed the role, abandoned by France after the Six-Day War, of principal supplier of major arms to Israel, first selling her some A-4 fighter-bombers to replenish wartime aircraft losses, and later selling her 50 modern F-4 Phantom jets. The U.S. has simultaneously attempted to maintain firm and friendly ties with the moderate Arab states, such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia, and to resume more normal relations with the radical Arab states in the area. Apparently feeling that the U.S. had become too closely identified with Israel, the Nixon administration in one of its first moves attempted to establish--or reestablish--an "even-handed" policy in the Middle East. This was immediately interpreted by some as an abandonment of Israel and hotly denounced. In the ensuing rhetoric, with raids and reprisals increasing in the Middle East and with the Soviets continuing to supply arms to the

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<sup>1</sup>"U.S. Will Aid Israel if Power Balance is Upset, Nixon Says," L.A. Times, 22 March 1970, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>"Text of Statement by Rogers and Excerpts from his News Conference," New York Times, March 24, 1970, p. 14.

radical Arab states, the U.S. seems to have slipped reluctantly back to being the principal supplier of Israel. From a pragmatic viewpoint, if the U.S. is to pursue a dual policy of the survival of Israel and non-involvement by U.S. military forces, the only feasible course seems to be to assure that Israel is strong enough to protect herself against all threats from her Arab neighbors. The great difficulty comes in trying to do this without further alienating the Arab states, further polarizing the Middle East and thus decreasing American influence in the area and back-handedly promoting Soviet influence.

The Russians, on the other hand, are probably also anxious to preserve Israel as a state. They have used the Arab-Israeli struggle to great advantage in the last few years in gaining a strong foothold in the Middle East. Were Israel to disappear, the disunity between Arab states could blossom again, raising the dangers for the Russians that aiding one Arab nation would alienate others.

### III. EXPANDING SOVIET NAVAL ACTIVITIES

The Soviet Navy has increased significantly since the end of World War II. According to a report prepared by the American Security Council and submitted to the House Committee on Armed Services in late 1968,<sup>1</sup> the USSR had commissioned 86 destroyers and 250 attack submarines in the preceding 20 years. These numbers compare to 14 destroyers and 45 attack submarines built by the U.S. during that period. The report states that, "Two-thirds of the U.S. active fleet is over 20 years old. Only one-tenth of the USSR fleet is over 20 years old."<sup>2</sup>

Notable as this build-up is, it may be less significant than the increase in Soviet naval activity in the Mediterranean within the last 6 years. Prior to about 1964 Soviet naval vessels made only occasional visits to the Mediterranean and did not operate there on a sustained basis. Starting in about 1964 the Soviets began to maintain a constant presence in that Sea with 3 or 4 naval vessels. By January 1967 there

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<sup>1</sup>"The Changing Strategic Naval Balance."

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

were 10 or 12 vessels in the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron; following the Six-Day War this fleet was rapidly expanded to about 35 vessels. "When this force was at its peak, it included a 15,000 ton guided-missile cruiser with 12 6-inch guns, 3 other heavy cruisers, 5 to 7 missile-equipped destroyers of the 4300-ton Kynda and smaller Kotlin class, 10 conventional and 2 nuclear powered submarines, 12 to 15 modern supply ships serving as floating bases in protected anchorages, and amphibious landing craft."<sup>1</sup> Admiral Sir John Hamilton, former Commander-in-Chief Allied Forces Mediterranean, stated "that the presence of this fleet is having a profound effect on men's minds. In this respect, it is contributing significantly to the rise of the Soviet influence in the Mediterranean area."<sup>2</sup>

The buildup continued during 1968 and 1969, reaching peaks of about 60 ships during exercises in November 1968 and April 1969 and 63 to 65 ships in August 1969. At the latter time, according to a U.S. Navy spokesman, there were 20 destroyers and other surface combat ships, 35 auxiliary and support ships, and 8 to 10 submarines operating with the Mediterranean Squadron.<sup>3</sup>

Two significant developments have accompanied this Soviet buildup in the Mediterranean. First, the Soviet navy must have learned techniques of refueling and replenishment without access to a major port. These techniques will help tremendously in divorcing the Soviet fleet from its home bases in the Soviet Union and giving it a wide-ranging capability.<sup>4</sup> Second, following the Six-Day War and perhaps as part of an agreement that sent some \$2 billion worth of war supplies to Egypt to replenish her June '67 losses,<sup>5</sup> the Soviets gained the use of storage and repair facilities, or nearly the equivalent of naval base rights,

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<sup>1</sup>"The Changing Strategic Naval Balance," p. 31.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 31-32.

<sup>3</sup>"Soviet Fleet Grows in the Mediterranean," New York Times, August 20, 1969, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>In 1969 the Pentagon reported a record number of 125 Soviet naval vessels away from home waters. See "Soviet Deploying Big Fleet Abroad," New York Times, August 21, 1969, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup>Hunter, p. 12.

at Alexandria and Port Said. Use of these facilities is ideal from the Soviet viewpoint, avoiding the stigma of military bases on foreign soil--against which the Soviets have so often declaimed--while enormously increasing the flexibility and staying power of the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron.

Another possible expansion of Soviet Mediterranean activities also apparently arose as part of the political coin of reequipping the Egyptian military: Soviet pilots reportedly fly Soviet TU-16 aircraft (with Egyptian markings) from Egyptian airfields on surveillance missions over the U.S. Sixth Fleet.<sup>1</sup> If this appears to be principally an adjunct of naval activities in the Mediterranean, it is also a double-edged sword, representing as it does the equivalent of Soviet airbase rights in Egypt. The Russians are also reported to have facilities at other Egyptian airfields and "staging rights"<sup>2</sup> in Syria and Iraq.

Buildup of Soviet Naval activity has not been confined to the Mediterranean Sea. In February of 1968, Admiral Sergei Gorshkov, Commander in Chief of the Soviet Navy, paid a ten-day visit to India. The following month the Soviet Squadron mentioned previously, consisting of the cruiser Dmitri Pozharsky flying the flag of Admiral Amelko, Commander of the Soviet Pacific Fleet, a missile ship and an antisubmarine vessel visited both Madras and Bombay and proceeded to other ports around the Indian Ocean. Their 23,000 mile cruise was the longest by a Soviet naval squadron since 1945. In March of 1969, three Soviet submarines, a sub tender, and a tanker were reportedly seen off the coast of Ceylon.<sup>3</sup>

The number of Soviet naval vessels in the Indian Ocean had apparently been increasing in recent months. At least two Russian task forces of 5 or 6 ships each reportedly entered the Indian Ocean through the Strait of Singapore and the Strait of Malacca, and the Australians supposedly shadowed such a task force off their west coast. A major combat vessel was in each of these forces. In addition, frequent reports of

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<sup>1</sup>Hunter, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>"Russia Moves Into Indian Ocean Area," p. 1.

Soviet submarines have suggested to some that the Soviets may be deploying missile-bearing submarines in the Bay of Bengal.<sup>1</sup>

Some Indian observers seem to take for granted the Soviet Union's future status as a Naval power in the Indian Ocean. One noted that the "arrival of the Soviet Navy means that for the first time since Vasco de Gama western naval supremacy is faced with a serious challenge." He added that, "on the western Flank of India, the Soviet Navy's appearance will have incalculable effect on the Persian Gulf."<sup>2</sup>

#### IV. U.S. AND U.S.S.R. AID TO THE MIDDLE EAST

In 1954 the Soviet Union began extending economic aid to under-developed countries, a practice the United States has been heavily involved in since the second World War. There are, of course, aspects of humanitarianism in economic aid, particularly as practiced by the United States. There can be little doubt, however, that both superpowers have used their economic aid to one extent or another either in shoring up a buffer-zone defense against the other superpower or in an attempt to gain some measure of influence with the aided country. During the Marshall Plan, for example, a large part of U.S. economic aid went to Western Europe in a successful attempt to make the countries there economically viable so they could help protect themselves against spreading Communism.

Since the Soviets started from a more isolated position, their aid has comprised a more noticeable attempt to gain influence than has American aid. They have concentrated nearly two-thirds of their aid in the Middle East and South Asia, areas which the Soviets would undoubtedly like to incorporate into an enlarged Soviet defense system.

That aid can be humanitarian somewhat clouds the issue. That it has been used to extend systems of defense, however, implies that it can be an indirect measure of the importance a country attaches to a particular area. In the Middle East, because of the turmoil in the

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<sup>1</sup>"Russia Moves Into Indian Ocean Area," p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>"The Changing Strategic Naval Balance," p. 34.

area, the ebb and flow of political power, and the other interests previously discussed, it must remain an uncertain measure. Nevertheless, some comparisons are enlightening.

United States aid to foreign countries continued after World War II. In the three years from 1946 through 1948, over \$6.5 billion was granted outright to other nations, and loans extended totaled another \$8 billion.<sup>1</sup> In the Middle East this assistance was all in the form of loans and the major recipients were Turkey with \$44.5 million and Iran with nearly \$26 million. The only other Middle East countries receiving appreciable aid in those years were the UAR with \$18 million and Saudi Arabia with just over \$14 million.

By the end of the Marshall Plan period in 1952, economic grants to the Middle East totaled over \$250 million and loans had climbed to nearly \$330 million.<sup>2</sup> These were a small part of worldwide U.S. aid, however, most of which was going to rebuild our European allies during those years. The grants to the Middle East were only slightly more than 1 percent of worldwide U.S. grants and the loans were less than 3 percent of the worldwide total.

In the early 1950s, with the economic recovery of Europe essentially complete, the United States shifted its foreign aid to other areas of the world. During the Mutual Security Act period from 1953 through 1961, U.S. economic aid to less developed countries totaled nearly 90 percent of all U.S. foreign aid, whereas during the Marshall Plan period from 1949 through 1952, less than 25 percent of U.S. aid had been so

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<sup>1</sup> All data on U.S. foreign economic and military aid are from "U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants and Assistance From International Organizations," Agency for International Development, May 29, 1969.

<sup>2</sup> None of the figures quoted include any portion of U.S. contributions to international organizations, which amounted to nearly \$4 billion from 1946 through 1968. In addition to general funds that may have been applied in part to the Middle East, such as the U.N. Development Program (U.S. contribution: \$624 million), U.N. Children's Fund (U.S. contribution: \$265 million), U.N./FAO-World Food Program (\$133 million from the U.S.), and the World Health Organization (\$121 million from the U.S.), these contributions include some specifically earmarked for that area, such as \$438 million for the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees.

directed. In the Middle East, U.S. economic aid increased perceptibly after 1953; it averaged about \$190 million per year in grants and \$200 million per year in loans from 1953 to 1966. As a percentage of worldwide U.S. economic aid, the amount extended to the Middle East appeared even more important, with grants averaging nearly 9 1/2 percent and loans over 12 1/2 percent of the worldwide totals.

As Table 3 shows, Turkey has always been a special case for the United States, receiving about 37 percent of the economic aid for the entire Middle East region. This is in keeping with the concept of the Northern Tier which sought to build up Turkey and Iran as bastions against Communist expansion, the embodiment of the policy of containment in this region. The other Northern Tier country, Iran, received about 15 percent of the U.S. economic aid to the Middle East.

After 1966, however, U.S. economic aid to the Middle East decreased sharply. Grants to the area in 1968 totaled only \$36 million, a mere 1.7 percent of the worldwide total. Although substantial loans were made to Israel (\$77 million), Turkey (\$52 million), and Iran (\$40 million), total loans to the Middle East dropped to \$180 million, about 7 percent of the worldwide total.

USSR economic aid to the Middle East started only in 1954 and can therefore most appropriately be compared to the U.S. figures since 1953. Since 1954 Soviet Union credits and grants to Middle East nations, as shown in Table 4, have totaled about \$2 1/4 billion, less than 40 percent of U.S. economic aid during that period. However, total worldwide Soviet aid in those years was only \$6 1/4 billion, barely more than U.S. aid to the Middle East alone. Aid to the Middle East, then, has been over 35 percent of the total worldwide Soviet program, indicating the relative importance the Soviets have attached to gaining a foothold in this area of the world.

In addition to this aid directly from the USSR, nations in the Middle East have received economic assistance from Communist states in Eastern Europe, undoubtedly extended in many cases at the urging of the Soviet Union. The area has received nearly half of Eastern Europe's total foreign economic aid, which has added another \$1 billion of Communist aid to the Middle East.

Table 3

UNITED STATES ECONOMIC LOANS AND GRANTS  
TO MIDDLE EAST NATIONS<sup>a</sup>  
(Millions of Dollars)

Nation	1953-1968		Total 1946-1968	
	Loans	Grants	Loans	Grants
Iran	519.6	436.2	545.5	452.7
Iraq	26.2	28.7	27.1	29.3
Israel	651.2	282.1	786.0	369.0
Jordan	22.1	550.8	22.1	556.0
Kuwait	50.0	-	50.0	-
Lebanon	7.3	70.6	8.9	72.1
Saudi Arabia	12.0	27.1	31.1	27.5
Syria	24.1	38.6	24.0	39.0
Turkey	1,184.5	1,008.6	1,314.1	1,148.2
U.A.R.	711.9	290.3	729.8	293.0
Yemen	-	42.7	-	42.7
CENTO	18.3	35.0	18.3	35.0
Regional <sup>b</sup>	18.3	239.7	18.3	242.3
Total M.E. (Less Regional)	3,227.2	2,810.7	3,556.9	3,064.5
Total Worldwide	27,266	33,276	38,782	55,944

<sup>a</sup>"U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants and Assistance from International Organizations," Agency for International Development, May 29, 1969.

<sup>b</sup>Includes Near East and South Asia.

Table 4

U.S.S.R. AND EASTERN EUROPE ECONOMIC CREDITS  
AND GRANTS TO MIDDLE EAST NATIONS<sup>a</sup>  
(Millions of Current U.S. Dollars)

Nation	U.S.S.R. Total 1954-1968	Eastern Europe Total 1954-1968
Iran	508	331
Iraq	184	-
Syria	233	169
Turkey	210	8
U.A.R.	1,011	562
Yemen	92	17
Total M.E.	2,238	1,087
Total worldwide	6,296	2,460

<sup>a</sup>U.S. Department of State, "Communist Governments and Developing Nations: Aid and Trade in 1968," RSE-65, Sept. 5, 1969, p. 3.

As shown in Table 4, the lion's share of this aid has been given to the U.A.R., which has been the recipient of nearly half of all USSR and Eastern European aid to the Middle East. In the last few years, however, as Iran's memories of post-World War II faded and she began to pursue a rapprochement with the Soviet Union, that country has also received considerable aid from the USSR and her European satellites. Of the total of \$840 million extended to Iran from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, \$450 million was negotiated in 1968.<sup>1</sup> This makes Iran by far the second largest recipient of Communist Bloc aid in the Middle East.

<sup>1</sup>\$200 million of this was a credit from Czechoslovakia that was not finalized until 1969. See U.S. Department of State, "Communist Governments and Developing Nations: Aid and Trade in 1968," RSE-65, Sept. 5, 1969, p. 3.

Economic assistance is not the only kind of aid given to the Middle East by the superpowers. Perhaps more pertinent to defense issues is the amount of military aid extended to the area, and in this activity both the United States and the Soviet Union have been heavily involved, although with some essential differences.

In her military assistance program the United States has extended over \$4 billion in grants and over \$550 million in credit assistance to nations in the Middle East. Ninety-six percent of the grants, however, have been given to the two Northern Tier countries of Turkey and Iran--75 percent to Turkey alone, as indicated in Table 5. Prior to 1968 nearly 70 percent of the credit assistance to the area had also been extended to the Northern Tier, in this case all to Iran. Aside from Turkey and Iran, U.S. military aid to the Middle East has been only in the neighborhood of \$160 million in grants and, prior to 1968, about the same amount in credit assistance.

Furthermore, the United States has professed and apparently followed a policy of trying to maintain an arms balance in the Middle East nations--between Israel and her Arab antagonists, and among the various Arab states. A large part of her military assistance, for example, has gone to Iraq and Jordan. In the meantime, even sales of military equipment to Israel have been held to a minimum, and at times refused. Most recently, in March of this year, the U.S. Government announced that it would "hold in abeyance for now" an Israeli request to buy more modern aircraft, saying that, "in our judgement, Israel's air capacity is sufficient to meet its needs for the time being."<sup>1</sup> The U.S. has also tried to extract an agreement from the Russians to limit arms shipments to the Middle East as an effort to curtail military activities in the area and lessen the chance of a full-scale resumption of hostilities.

The Russians have refused this overture, however, and have continued their supply of arms to the so-called "radical" Arab states, to whom nearly all of their military assistance has been given. The UAR, Syria, and Iraq are the principal recipients of this Soviet military aid. The Soviets make no announcements of the amount of their military

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<sup>1</sup>"U.S. Will Aid Israel if," p. 14.

Table 5

**U.S. MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**  
(Chargeable to Foreign Assistance Act Appropriations)  
**CREDIT ASSISTANCE AND GRANTS TO MIDDLE EAST NATIONS<sup>a</sup>**  
(Millions of Dollars)

Nation	1968		Total 1946-1968	
	Credit Assistance	Grants	Credit Assistance	Grants
Iran	47.1	40.2	399.8	870.5
Iraq	-	b	-	50.0
Israel	c	-	c	-
Jordan	c	2.4	c	65.3
Kuwait	-	-	-	-
Lebanon	-	0.1	-	9.2
Saudi Arabia	c	1.0	c	35.9
Syria	-	b	-	0.1
Turkey	-	182.8	-	3,090.1
U.A.R.	-	-	-	-
Yemen	-	-	-	b
CENTO	-	0.3	-	0.7
Regional <sup>d</sup>	27.4	0.4	350.0	838.1
Total M.E. (Less Regional and Classified)	47.1	226.8	399.8	4,121.8
Total, worldwide	753	864	2,922	39,208

<sup>a</sup>"U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants and Assistance from International Organizations," Agency for International Development, May 29, 1969.

<sup>b</sup>Less than \$50,000.

<sup>c</sup>Data classified. Credit assistance to Israel prior to 1968: 23.9.  
Credit assistance to Jordan prior to 1968: 12.9.  
Credit assistance to Saudi Arabia prior to 1968: 123.0.

<sup>d</sup>Includes Near East and South Asia.

assistance, of course. Already substantial prior to the Six-Day War, Soviet arms shipments to the Middle East suddenly bounded upward in the months following that war as they hurried to replace a large portion of the equipment that had been destroyed or captured by the Israelis. It is estimated that between 80 and 100 percent of the lost army and air force equipment was replaced by the USSR and that the equipment supplied to Egypt alone was perhaps "worth as much as \$2,000 million if measured in terms of the cost of providing similar western equipment."<sup>1</sup> While Egypt has been by far the largest recipient of Soviet military aid in the Middle East, current arms levels balanced against the losses of the Six-Day War indicate that sizable aid has been extended to Syria and Iraq as well.<sup>2</sup>

Even by the more rigorous standards of modern warfare in Europe, the equipments supplied to these Arab states by the Soviets is not obsolescent. Many are of a type still in active Soviet inventories, and some have been supplied to the Middle East nations before the Russians have given similar weapons to their Eastern European satellites. Among the modern Soviet weapons in Egypt are T-54 and T-55 medium tanks, Mig-21 and Su-7 fighter-bombers, "OSA" and "KOMAR" boats with "STYX" surface-to-surface missiles<sup>3</sup> and SA-2 and SA-3 air defense missiles.<sup>4</sup>

The major portion of Soviet military aid to the Middle East was apparently intended to rebuild the armies that were so badly shattered in the Six-Day War. This is particularly true in the case of Egypt. The Soviet's best interests would undoubtedly be served if the Egyptian forces were to be more effective when and if the full-scale battle with Israel were rejoined for a fourth time. They may also wish that the Egyptian army is seen to be more fit, as an added deterrent to Israel.

The newest development may imply a sharp alteration in Soviet intent, however. The SA-3 surface-to-air missiles are the latest additions in the UAR, and perhaps the most significant for our present

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<sup>1</sup>Hunter, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup>"The Military Balance, 1969-70," The Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1969, pp. 43, 45.

<sup>3</sup>Four of these missiles sank the Israeli destroyer Elath in 1967. See New York Times, 23 Oct. 1967, 1:8, and 24 Oct. 1967, 1:5.

<sup>4</sup>"The Military Balance," p. 46, and New York Times, 3-19-70, 1:2.

discussion. The SA-3 is reportedly designed to operate against low-altitude aircraft and would therefore be a significant addition to the SA-2 system (which the Israelis have proven time and again to be ineffective against low-altitude flights). They were reportedly accompanied by about 1500 Soviet troops, and their introduction has encouraged speculation that the Russians may be moving to establish in Egypt a complete air defense system manned by Russians.<sup>1</sup>

These 1500 military personnel that reportedly accompanied the SA-3 missiles bring the reported total number of Soviet military personnel in Egypt to about 4,500.<sup>2</sup> (In addition to this some 600 Soviet military personnel are reported to be in Syria.<sup>3</sup>) These military personnel in Egypt apparently have a primary function of training and advising the Egyptian army, where they are reported to be present down to battalion level.<sup>4</sup> The troops with the SA-3s may also be intended to train Egyptians to man these missiles. However, one knowledgeable source estimated that it might be 12 to 18 months before the Egyptians could be taught to operate and maintain these sophisticated systems. If this is true--and the estimate does not seem unreasonable--then the Russians will be essentially the only personnel manning the SA-3s in Egypt for some time to come.

Some early reports seem to indicate that the SA-3 missiles were first being deployed around Alexandria and airfields outside of Cairo. If true, this could indicate that the Russians intend as a principal use of these missiles the protection of bases where they have gained de facto military base rights. Such an intent would not be surprising. By their military aid and their increased involvement in the UAR, the Soviets have paid a high price for their position and their use of Egyptian bases. These bases have obviously become the cornerstone of Soviet expansion into the Mediterranean and, they must hope, beyond. If the Suez Canal could be reopened, they would also be valuable for expansion into the Indian Ocean. To needlessly risk the loss of Russian

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<sup>1</sup>"Israelis vs. Arabs: Comparison of the Weapons and Forces of Antagonists in the Mideast," New York Times, 24 March 1970, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>3,000 were previously reported in Hunter, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Hunter, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

equipment and personnel, or possibly the loss of the bases themselves because of their exposure to Israeli attack during the current activities or in a renewed Arab-Israeli war, must seem foolhardy to the Russians. Loss of use of the bases would certainly be a big step backward. The Soviets must therefore place special emphasis on improvement of the Egyptian air defense system, and further measures to that end might be expected.

A dilemma faces both the Soviets in their attempt to rebuild the armed forces of the radical Arab states in the Middle East and the United States in its attempt to maintain Israeli strength to a point where the Israelis can protect themselves against any Arab onslaught. Both of these attempts may increase the danger that Middle East warfare may be renewed and that the superpowers, as a consequence, might be dragged into an unwanted confrontation. In Egypt, more effective forces and heavier Soviet involvement could tempt Nasser into a new adventure, perhaps through miscalculation or over-confidence, as a new attempt to capture wider Arab support and secure a Nasserite Pan-Arabism. New arms in Israel, claimed to be needed to counterbalance growing Egyptian capabilities, seem to make possible more daring and sometimes more devastating raids into Arab territories. This also serves to raise the temperature in the Middle East and, although intended to deter the Arabs by demonstrating Israeli superiority, could serve to goad them into the very actions that neither the Israelis nor the superpowers want. In spite of these dangers, military aid will apparently continue. It may be given reluctantly, but Middle East clients clamor for it and the diverging and conflicting superpower interests seem to demand it. Holding it to "safe" levels and types will be a major challenge in the 70s.

#### V. GEOGRAPHIC ACCESSIBILITY AND SUPERPOWER DEPLOYMENTS

From the viewpoint of either the United States or the Soviet Union, the Middle East remains an area that is not easy to reach with military forces in an emergency. Ships from the United States east coast must make over a 5000-mile voyage to reach the Middle East. At 15 knots, troop ships would require more than 28 days to cover this distance. Not only is the voyage long, but the last 2100 miles must be made

through the relatively narrow confines of the Mediterranean Sea. During that part of the trip the ships would be exposed to possible actions by the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron, to submarines in the Mediterranean, and to aircraft attack from neighboring land bases. Even if the Sixth Fleet could control the sea lane, the threat from land-based air attack might require that all ships be escorted and might mean that some losses would be suffered.

From the west coast of the United States, the nearest point in the Middle East--the southeast coast of Arabia, an unlikely place for U.S. action--is over 12,000 miles away. To reach Iran or Israel, where U.S. involvement might seem more likely, requires further sailing through confined waters in the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf on the one hand, or the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea on the other. Ships in these waters could also be exposed to ground-based air attack, and furthermore would not have the benefit of protection from the Sixth Fleet.

Transport aircraft such as the C-141 and the C-5 give the United States another option for moving forces to the Middle East, although air movement also involves problems. The shortest route from the U.S. to Israel, for example, passes over France, Italy and Greece. Given the current attitude of the French Government, permission to make such flights over France is questionable. The flight could be routed further south over Spain, but again overflight rights are doubtful and at best might require extensive negotiation. Still further south the planes might pass through the Straits of Gibraltar and make the entire flight over water, but this would expose them, too, to the threat of possible enemy land-based air opposition. Without escorts these transport aircraft might be excessively vulnerable to enemy air activities and to sea-based surface-to-air missiles.

True, the United States Sixth Fleet has been the dominant force in the Mediterranean Sea for more than 20 years. Two aircraft carriers are part of its normal complement of some 50 or more ships. As we have seen, however, increases in the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron have overtaken the Sixth Fleet numerically. Although the Soviet Squadron operates without aircraft carriers, it does have many missile launching ships and several submarines, and could perhaps call upon Badger bombers for added

support. The Sixth Fleet may possess adequate fire power to remain the dominant force in the area, but its position has become uncertain and its movements are no longer free from possible challenge.

If it were unchallenged by the Mediterranean Squadron, the Sixth Fleet could be a significant force in the Middle East. Its guns, missiles and aircraft represent a sizable attack force by Middle East standards. On the other hand, the aircraft carriers themselves might be likely targets for fighter-bomber attack from nearby land bases. If forced to stand off at some distance for its own safety, the Sixth Fleet could lose part of its attack potential and perhaps a large part of its psychological effect.

The U.S. land forces closest to the Middle East are in West Germany, from where they could reach the Middle East in a few hours by airlift. The air route in this case is also uncertain, however, since any route to the south must pass over either Switzerland or Austria, both countries whose neutrality the United States would undoubtedly be anxious to respect. A swing to the west around Switzerland raises the French overflight question, while a much longer route around France and Spain poses all the formerly discussed problems about flying the length of the Mediterranean.

The U.S. has one other military asset that could be applied to the Middle East. The 16th Air Force, a part of the United States Air Forces, Europe, has its headquarters in Spain and operates from bases in Italy, Greece and Turkey. Although some of these bases are close enough to allow actions over a large part of the Middle East, political problems raised in recent years pose a question as to whether the United States would be willing--or even able--to use these bases for this purpose.

For the Soviet Union, the Middle East is an immediate southern neighbor. Yet she, too, could find the area not readily accessible. Although Turkey and Iran have softened their attitude toward the USSR and are increasing their trade with her, their memories of post-World War II activities leave them distrustful of intimate association. For the Russians, the case of Turkey is particularly important because the Turks control the Bosphorus. That narrow exit from the Black Sea must be the passageway for any Soviet seaborne forces launched from Russia's

good southern ports. Through that waterway a 4 or 5 day sail would reach the areas along the Eastern Mediterranean.

The international status of the Bosphorus was agreed in the Montreux Convention, which stipulates that non-military vessels have free passage through that Strait and that military vessels have free passage during peacetime, provided that Turkey is given 48 hours notice. The Turks for their part seem anxious to preserve their control of the Straits by observing the letter of the Convention. The Russians, on the other hand, frequently abuse the apparent intent of the Convention by submitting many prior notices which they fail to fulfill. Even so, it is questionable how far the Russians would be willing to go against Turkish wishes in moving forces through the Bosphorus to the Middle East, particularly during a war.

By land and by air the Soviets seem to be cut off from most of the Middle East by the two countries of the Northern Tier. Should they decide to violate Turkish or Iranian air space, on the other hand, even short-legged Russian fighter aircraft could reach other areas in the Middle East from bases in the Transcaucasus area. Transport aircraft would need only a fraction of their range capabilities on this route; the only need for the new AN-22 would be its ability to lift large and heavy military equipments.

The transport aircraft need not be restricted to flights that violate the air space of Iran or Turkey; their range would allow them to use a route over Yugoslavia and the Mediterranean, although this might expose them to sea-based or land-based opposition. Many short-legged fighter aircraft in Russian forces, however, would be unable to make the flight from a refueling base in Yugoslavia to airbases in the Middle East.

In spite of this seeming isolation, the Russians, as we have seen, have established a significant presence in the Mediterranean Sea and now operate with de facto military base rights in Egypt. To the east they are increasing their activities in the Indian Ocean, doubtless hoping to be the major power in that area after the British withdrawal. They have also established a significant military presence in the UAR and have some 600 military people in Syria.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

In the wake of the Vietnamese war, the U.S. is less likely than at any time in the last 30 years to become embroiled in any military activities overseas. In spite of considerable private investments in and income from Middle East oil, America may be unwilling to resort to military force to preserve those investments. In a sense, there seems to be a trend in some quarters to degrade the importance to the U.S. of the Middle East, especially with the devaluation, if it may be called that, of the Northern Tier.

The Northern Tier in the Middle East, once highly regarded by the United States as the successful embodiment in that area of the policy of containment, has lost much of that charm. Not only have Turkey and Iran softened their attitudes towards the Soviet Union, but the physical Soviet presence in the Mediterranean, in Egypt, and in the Indian Ocean demonstrates that the Northern Tier leaves much to be desired as a barrier against Communist expansion. Although Turkey will likely remain important as the Eastern anchor of NATO, the Middle East as a whole may appear to become less critical to U.S. defense, much as the Suez Canal has receded in importance in American eyes.

With regard to Israel, however, U.S. attitudes seem remarkably different. Although she may assess the threat to Israel in different terms than do the Israelis themselves--as in the recent case of holding in abeyance a decision to sell more warplanes--the United States appears unwilling to let Israel be overwhelmed by her Arab neighbors. This may continue to be true through the 70s, even though the U.S. may seem to view Israeli independence as ever less closely tied to threats to American freedom.

The Soviets, by contrast, seem ever more interested and ever more deeply involved in the Middle East. Frustrated for years in their drive to the south, the Soviets may now feel they have found in their arrangements in Egypt a key to unlock the southern door. Although their initial objective may have been only to decrease American influence in the area, they have undoubtedly gone beyond that by now and see their own influence growing in the UAR and in the Mediterranean. They may find that they have disappointingly--and perhaps dangerously--little control

over events in the Middle East, but the Soviets are unlikely to give up the position they have gained at such cost. They may be induced to take further steps to protect that position, in spite of the hazards of deeper commitment to the Arab cause.

The Middle East appears to be of special importance to the Soviets. Initially the key to their extension of meaningful power into the Mediterranean, it also forms a base for expanding into Africa and the Indian Ocean area, and the Russians may be expected to exploit opportunities that arise for moving out from that base. In the likely Soviet view, the Middle East may have become a part of the overall USSR defense system and a cornerstone in the extension of that system southward.

Because of the volatile nature of the Middle East, however, Russian gains in this area have probably not yet been solidified. Although she will direct her efforts to that end, the Soviet Union may still display considerable caution because of the latent danger of a confrontation with the United States.